

# A Guide to Analog ASICs

By Paul M. Brown Jr.



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Application specific integrated circuits (ASICs), both analog and digital, have become standard system level bulding blocks. ASIC vendors have attempted to provide tools that they hope will enable relatively inexperienced IC designers (i.e. systems engineers) to design sophisticated custom integrated circuits. This philosophy has been more successful in digital technology than in analog. Significantly more art is involved with analog design and far fewer computerized tools are available. Almost every analog ASIC vendor offers different semiconductor technologies, tool sets, documentation (usually lacking in detail and not providing the proper background and guidelines), and varying levels of engineering support. The result is that many engineers who could use analog ASICs lack the technical information to do so. They are not sure when custom analog ICs are cost effective or which vendor will best serve their needs. In addition, many engineers do not have adequate analog design experience, especially with integrated circuits. Consequently, many who could benefit from analog ASIC technology do not use it while others have bad experiences that could have easily been avoided.



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